

CHAPTER II

The New Psychology

MY FATHER did not build me a department store. He gave up peddling and opened a grocery store in a section of the city that was once residential but was at that time far gone into manufacturing. My mother operated a lunch room in the rear of the store. As far back as I can remember I had chores to do in connection with the establishment, even pitching in during my lunch hour. There was nothing "permissive" about my upbringing; I was expected to help out and did what I could as a matter of course. Sometimes I managed to shirk my duties in favor of a game of baseball or one o' cat, and sometimes these excursions cost me a good whipping. But, I knew the penalty for such deviationism, took it with good grace, and hoped the next time I would avoid it. There always was a next time.

I must apologize to the reader for bringing in such details of my rearing, which cannot concern anybody but myself, but it is necessary that I do so in order to point up some ideas that may be of general interest. For instance, modern psychology puts the blame for that deficiency of character known as juvenile delinquency on the rearing of children in slums; if that were so, I should have turned out to be a delinquent of proportions. For my early years,

THE NEW PSYCHOLOGY

until I got through high school, were spent in what might be considered in some respects worse than a slum. The store was located in a factory building and the family lived above the store, in a loft that had been made habitable by my older brothers; they partitioned the loft into rooms, which they papered and painted, and though my mother managed to keep the place clean, it still bore the marks of a factory loft; the hum of machinery in the upper lofts could be heard in our home during the daytime.

As a condition for the low rent we paid for these accommodations, my father agreed to perform certain janitorial services, and I, being a husky lad, was expected to carry out these terms of the lease. When I think now of some of the menial chores I had to perform my stomach turns. But, in those days a lad was expected to help out in any way he could to meet the family budget and I did my bit regularly though reluctantly. So that, between my homework (we had plenty of that in those pre-progressive days), my chores in the store and my janitorial duties, I was a very busy young man; it was a wonder I had a chance to sneak off once in a while to play ball, or marbles, or prisoner's base.

As I recall, most of the boys on the block had things to do that interfered with their penchant for play. One got up early to sell newspapers, another helped out in the afternoons at a junk shop, a couple delivered messages for Western Union, and all of them had home duties to perform. There were, of course, no home relief checks, no unemployment relief, no handouts of any kind; and there was little money around. As soon as a youngster was physically up to it, he was expected to help out in some way. This was a mat-

ter of necessity, not of therapy; but the necessity did help to shape character. We did not have time to get into much mischief, least of all to get mixed up with the law. The nearest we came to illegal practice was to rifle old houses of metal to sell to the junkman; that was the only way we could get hold of a nickel for a baseball or a quarter for a bat.

The gang consisted of a composite of "minorities," although we did not know it and there was nobody around to tell us what a minority was. Practically all of the children were first generation Americans, the offspring of French, Italian, Irish and a few Jewish immigrants. The language spoken in the home was different from that spoken in the street. But, there were no minority "problems" to bother us, and none of the neuroticisms that modern psychology ascribes to such problems. We were just too busy to indulge in self pity, too preoccupied with getting along to think of ourselves as misunderstood minorities. Yes, we called the Italians "wops," the Irish "micks," the French "frogs" and the Jews "sheeneys." But the terms were more descriptive than derogatory. We got along.

I recall some gang fights. When a group from another ward invaded our own, there was a challenge and then fists would fly. Occasionally we would apply sticks or throw stones, but I never knew of knives or shotguns being used. Most of the fighters were younger children, under fourteen, since those who had attained that age were engaged in gainful occupations. The modern delinquent, or at least the leader of delinquents, is found among those who are compelled, by the law, to attend school after the age of fourteen; he has no interest in learning, finds it boring, and con-

THE NEW PSYCHOLOGY

sequently gets into mischief. The authorities cannot throw him out and are unable to discipline him. He becomes a disruptive influence in the class. He hates the teacher, he hates the school, he hates society that tries to impose an education upon him; and, being mature enough to figure things out for himself, he devises ways and means of giving vent to this hatred; he turns to violence. Moreover, if his family is on relief, he has learned from conversations in the home that society owes him a living, that there are ways of tricking the authorities into giving relief where none is due, according to the law, and takes it for granted that stealing is proper so long as one can get away with it. In my youth, the only one who did any stealing was a thief, not a delinquent.

Psychology is far from being a science, and probably never will attain that status. That is because it is impossible to study the operations of the human mind under laboratory conditions, or to derive from such empirical knowledge any laws by which to prognosticate future reactions to given stimuli. Under the circumstances, the best the psychologist can do is to make educated guesses about the cause of behavior, and as likely as not such guesses may be far from the mark. Since Pavlov's dogs, psychologists have sought to ascribe all human behavior to environmental influences, maintaining that if one can control or shape the environment of the child one can predict his behavior. In brief, environmentalism holds that the human being comes into this world a bit of protoplasm that can be molded by the influences brought to bear upon him. It negates the idea that the child may bring into the world a personality all its own, endowed with instincts and proclivities that can be

developed by environmental influences but not originating in them. It is materialistic with a vengeance.

According to environmentalism, all of my gang should have become juvenile delinquents; our home lives, according to the psychologists, had all the necessary ingredients. Yet, I do not remember any of us getting involved in the law, except occasionally the truancy law. I remember once being nabbed by a policeman for inadvertently breaking a window with a baseball; he gave me a good fanning to begin with, then brought me home; my father, after agreeing to pay for the damages done, added a few whacks of his own to those administered by the law. And that was that. Today, thanks to modern psychology, the policeman dare not touch a young rascal who has deliberately committed some crime against society, in fear of being himself brought in on charges of brutality to children; indeed, he may be lectured on the law by the law breaker: "You can't do nothin' to me, I'm a juvenile." And the judge before whom the young criminal is brought, being versed in modern psychology, will in all likelihood discharge his duty by lecturing the parents on the art of bringing up children; psychologically, of course.

We did not become delinquents because we were much too busy for such shenanigans, and when we did let the spirit of mischief get hold of us, punishment was immediate and certain. We feared our parents, we feared our teacher, we feared the cop on the corner; and so we kept in line with the moral code. We were treated as responsible beings, not as irresponsible products of our environment. And we responded accordingly.

Of course, there was plenty of crime in those days, though

THE NEW PSYCHOLOGY

not as much as today, simply because there were not as many laws to violate. But crimes committed by those under twenty-one were practically unknown, while today these young malefactors constitute the main problem of law enforcement agencies. While it would be difficult to establish a cause and effect relationship between juvenile crime and institutionalized psychiatry, the coincidence is remarkable; the more the notions of psychiatrists are activated by law, the greater the incidence of juvenile delinquency.

First, there is the notion that slums make for delinquency; the environmental theory. It is true that politicians took to public housing for the purpose of garnering votes, but it is also true that they latched onto the psychological argument to support their urgency for subsidized housing: take the people out of the slums, put them into nice quarters and they will live up to the dignity of their new surroundings. But, it has not worked out that way. The folks who get their rent cheap, at the expense of other taxpayers, acquire the notion that society is obligated to take care of them—good Freudianism—and that these rooms are a down payment on that obligation. They have little or no investment in their quarters, have no interest in them, and defacement of the premises and misuse of the facilities follow from this lack of interest; the publicly-owned houses become worse slums than the privately-owned ones they replaced. In part, this is accomplished by the youth who infest these edifices. The formation of gangs of young bloods living in such close proximity is easy, while the common basement does well as gang headquarters. Maybe some of the boys and girls living in these houses would prefer to stay out of the gang, but it is difficult to practice isolation-

ism in such close quarters; and the leaders are quite persuasive. Mischief follows.

Then there are the institutions of home relief and unemployment handouts. Here again it is difficult to say whether politics or psychiatry is the prime mover, but that Freudianism fits in well with political motivation is quite clear. Society—that indefinite something that is more than the sum of its parts, and has an existence quite apart from that of the individuals who compose it—owes us all a living. The social workers, most of whom have “majored” in psychology, go about their business of handing out taxpayers’ money with the firm conviction that they are helping to build a better society, meanwhile acquiring a vested interest in the dispensing of largess. The effect on the recipients, quite different from that expected by the psychiatric energumens, is to encourage malingering. They devise ways and means of getting more than the law allows, including that of borrowing children from one another when the social worker arrives for a checkup of the family size. Or, in the case of unemployment “insurance,” of finding excuses for not taking jobs offered until the period of “insurance” has expired. These lessons in chiseling are not lost on the young ones, and they too acquire the habit of looking to society for their keep. They get money without doing anything to earn it and see no point in trying to earn it. From getting money through relief to getting money from anybody who might have it is an easy transition in thought. Thus the groundwork for thuggery, holdups and even burglary is laid in “social” legislation.

Psychology of the Freudian variety has infested our courts of law, even to the encouragement of juvenile delinquency. Perhaps teenage criminals should be handled

THE NEW PSYCHOLOGY

differently from more mature criminals, but not from the viewpoint that society is to blame for their criminal acts, which seems to be the viewpoint of our judges today. If they are old enough to go in for mayhem and murder, robbery and rape, they are old enough to stand the consequences of their acts. Besides, it is the duty of government to protect society, including the decent children, from hoodlums of any age, not to protect these hoodlums at the risk of society. It may be that places of rehabilitation are preferable to prisons for the incarceration of such young criminals, but in any case their removal from society is called for. But our courts and our whole governmental machinery are geared to the notion that teenagers are wards of society and must be coddled. The result of such leniency is to encourage juvenile delinquency.

It is a matter of record that some delinquents come from economically comfortable homes. This phenomenon calls for some other environmental explanation, such as parental friction or "broken homes." To which the statistics answer with some embarrassing facts; namely, that some very decent children come out of "broken homes," while rascals are known to emerge from quite normal homes. The psychiatrists, somewhat baffled by these facts, thereupon come up with the statement that juvenile delinquency is not a social problem at all; children have always been playful and mischievous, and that if we only have patience with their pranks (including murder) they will turn out all right.

The fact is that materialistic or environmental psychiatry is of a piece with the dialectical materialism currently in vogue. When Karl Marx declared that all history is shaped by economic forces, he not only opened the road for in-

tellektual support of all the "social" legislation that has come upon us, but also to psychological notions that correspond with it. For, if man has nothing to do with making history, he also has nothing to do with making his environment; the economic forces that shape the one also shape the other. This mystique of economic forces turns the individual into an inconsequential accident of time. It robs him of his personality and denies him his soul. He is, in short, nothing but the product of these forces, which work mechanistically and ineluctably.

However, and here is the contradiction in the reasoning of those who accept the theory of economic determinism, it is possible for some men to manage the economics of other men so as to bring about their improvement. Some men, therefore, are endowed with the power and the gift for altering the environment of the mass of men who, by definition, are utterly unable to manage their own environment. And so, we come upon the theory of the welfare state, that it is possible for a well-trained bureaucracy to so distribute the wealth of a nation as to bring about a betterment in the lives of the masses, and thus improve the general psychology. Economics is still the determining factor in all behavioristic patterns, but the patterns can be processed by economic management. To put it succinctly, if a man is provided with the comforts of life his psyche will react accordingly.

In a way, the economic determinists are right. If a man is provided with all the comforts of life, with little or no effort on his part, his psyche will demand more of these comforts—free gratis, and he will lose that independence of spirit that comes only through the exercise of will in overcoming ob-

THE NEW PSYCHOLOGY

stacles to the satisfaction of his desires. He is likely to become like an animal waiting for the food that is thrown to him, unable to forage for himself. He is likely to become a malingerer.

As for those who are compelled to pay for the subsidies, they too undergo a psychological change. So long as there are loopholes in the income tax laws, they will continue exercising their ingenuity and their energies in the production of more goods, in the hope that their standard of living can be maintained in spite of the tax-take; the loopholes must be large enough to enable them to keep much of their earnings out of the hands of the tax collector. Of course, there is the inclination to find loopholes where they do not exist, or to rip them out of the fabric of the law, legally or illegally. The income tax laws have had this effect on the psychology of the taxpayers: it has made them dishonest. But, if these loopholes are plugged up, and the tax collector insists on gathering every cent of what is due him under the law, the tendency will be to give up on the struggle to keep up productive effort. Already signs of this what's-the-use psychology have been manifested.

Thirdly, the psychological effect on those who undertake the job of managing the economy must be mentioned. These bureaucrats, having power, naturally acquire a holier-than-thou attitude toward both the recipients of largess and the payers. They are the government; the rest are "people." Thus, thanks to institutionalized psychology, the social structure is gradually being divided into two new classes, the bureaucracy and "the people," the one anointed with political power, the other being ground into submission "for their own good."

There were psychologists when I was a boy, and for hundreds of years before that. People have always concerned themselves with the workings of men's minds. But, in former years the psychologists—such as Shakespeare, Balzac and Tolstoy—took it for granted that men were born with certain proclivities and nothing could be done about changing them; put into given situations these proclivities or inclinations would show up and lead the characters to an inevitable conclusion. There was a bit of fatalism in that kind of psychology, which followed from the basic premise, namely, that men were born with unfathomable souls which showed up in the environment they made for themselves. That is to say, men were endowed with free will, with the power of making choices, and were accountable for the choices they made. That line of thought, however, has gone out of style, and whether the new psychological mode is more commendable only time will tell.